

From: "tim.mccoy@ngpc.ne.gov%inter2" <tim.mccoy@ngpc.ne.gov>
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Email: tim.mccoy@ngpc.ne.gov

FirstName: Timothy

LastName: McCoy

Address1: 1617 1st Ave

Address2:

City: Kearney

State: Nebraska

zipcode: 68847

Question1: USDA policy and rules, at minimum need to be crafted to provide a level playing field for new farmers and ranchers entering agriculture. New farmers and ranchers don't just need an opportunity to enter agriculture, but need an opportunity to do so and exceed.

Comments from large agriculture business in the press have indicated that CRP is now limiting opportunity for new farmers to enter production agriculture. Unfortunately, these short-sighted comments neglect to realize that those lands were enrolled in CRP because they were marginal in productivity and profitability. The likelihood of new entrants into production agriculture to succeed will be very low if they are only limited to marginally productive lands. If maintaining the number of farmers and ranchers, and assisting beginning farmers and ranchers is truly important to USDA and national farm policy, then this needs to be a stated goal of USDA policy that requires review and analysis of the impacts of all programs to ensure that this goal is met.

Question2: USDA programs, when initiated, were done so to help move US agriculture to additional levels of conservation and productivity.

However, in the rush to be productive, USDA and ag policy have become narrowly focused on a few key commodities. New policy needs to encourage, rather than discourage, farmers to diversify their operations, in terms of both the number of crops and products (eg. value added products) that are marketed by the landowner. The diversification in crops and products will allow farmers to be positioned to take advantage of new market opportunities in both in the US and abroad. USDA policy should provide incentives and support for farmers and ranchers to become more innovative in what they grow and what they market from their operation.

Question3: First, assistance to producers should be provided based on actions that are worthy of reward (eg. provide benefits beyond those tangible to the producer). Second, farm policy should provide a safety net so that farmers and ranchers, and their families, can maintain their operations through difficult economic conditions. Finally, assistance to producers needs to be a true safety net, rather than providing baseling guaranteed income on a few commodities. US ag policy needs to recognize that producers will not gain additional rewards in a world market unless our producers can respond quickly and effeciently to changing needs in a world market.

Question4: Conservation and environmental goals are a key tangible product of farm policy that provide benefits to all taxpayers.

Conservation and environmental goals, as with most of the goals addressed in these questions, can only be met by being specific and deliberate about what programs are going to achieve. USDA needs to become more broadly focused in maximizing conservation and environmental benefits of programs and practices; broader resource needs can be met through USDA programs and practices with purposeful planning and assistance to attempt to gain the most benefits from assistance provided to landowners, rather than simply requiring landowners to meet some

established minimum criteria. The conservation and environmental needs can vary greatly across the country, which will require more flexibility and sophistication in how conservation and environmental programs are delivered by USDA. One size does not fit all situations for conservation, and USDA needs to recognize that in providing national oversight of programs. Finally, if future farm policy becomes anchored on tangible conservation and environmental benefits, USDA will need to broaden the technical assistance and expertise provided to local producers.

Question5: Rural assistance needs to provide training and support for those wanting to enter into agriculture, either in production or in value-added agriculture related ventures. This assistance needs to be focuses on providing sustainable rural economies that do not depend on the continued addition of government funds (subsidies, payments, tax credits, etc) for the continued economic success of the venture.

Question6: Product development, marketing, and research need to be directed towards ensuring that benefits from these activities benefits all sectore of agriculture, and have direct positive impacts on farmers and ranchers and rural communities. The continued development of new products and research need to provide true added value to agriculture and have benefits that reach producers and local communities.

Additionally, USDA needs to clearly evaluate and report how benefits of these activities reach both producers and taxpayers of this country.